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Summer 2002

Network News, Vol.5, No.[2] ([Summer] 2002)

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Maine Rural Network

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Recommended Citation

Winterfalcon, Naomi and Maine Rural Network, "Network News, Vol.5, No.[2] ([Summer] 2002)" (2002).
Network News. 19.

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/network_news/19

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NETWORK NEWS

The Newsletter of the Maine Rural Network



Volume 5, No. 1 [2]

Spring 2002

[Summer?]

"I Choose to Live Here"

excerpts from an interview with Terry White

[I was] born and raised here in Presque Isle...went to school here all my life, went to Boston...for several years for schooling, decided to come home 'cause it's a much nicer place to live. Really came out as being gay my freshman year in college, probably typical for most people. Didn't really want to admit it because I was brought up in the church all my life, you know I was very, very into the church scene and...It was an Advent Christian church...and I had actually gone to school to become a minister. And some of the things that I had to go through while I was at school and dealing with my sexuality, weren't exactly the funnest. I actually ended up leaving the school midway through the first semester because there was a lot – a lot of double standards, um, to do with the church. So I, I came home, relaxed for about a year, [laugh] tried to pick up the pieces a little bit and decided that I was going to give the church a second chance. And so I went to a school out in Rhode Island, and worked in a church for a few years, um, they found out I was gay.... Unfortunately, the church that I worked in had a, a difficulty [laugh in voice] with that, to put it positively and so, once again I came back home.

When I came back home,...I took a job here in town and, this was back in '95 for the referendum, and I had gone to work one day with a little "No on 1" pin and they came up to me and said, you know, "do you mind, we're a non-political organization. Do you mind taking the pin off?" That's fine, I can understand, you know, not wanting to politic at work. Um, and I made

no qualms about being gay at this particular job. I'd finally dealt with my sexuality enough to feel comfortable with it and if they had a problem with it, it was just that, it was their problem. I put up a picture of me and one of my friends, I had my arm around him, it wasn't anything out of the ordinary, just two friends sitting there, and they...asked me take the picture down because it was offensive to other people. So, I looked around the office space – huge cubicles everywhere – and there were people with, you know, their daughter, their sons, friends, in similar poses. So I asked them to see their written policy on it because they said you weren't supposed to have personal things in your workspace. So I'm like, "Ok, well, can I see a written policy on it." "Well, we don't have a written policy." So I retorted, "So it can't really be an enforceable policy if you don't have a written policy." Um, and we went back and forth, back and forth for a long time.... Um, eventually I ended up leaving that job, um, for the stress that I was going through while I was there and the pay that they were paying me – it wasn't worth it. [laugh]

When I first came out to my folks, I was in Massachusetts and I was seeing somebody at the time and we had just broken up. Um, my folks, at this point, probably suspected that I was gay but...I never told them, we never talked about it. Um and my coming out story to them is a little unusual is I called them up on the phone to talk to them because I was really at a very low point and got the answering machine. So I actually came out to my folks on the answering machine.

[Laughter]. I just said, "Mom, Dad, you know, the person that I brought home a couple of times, well he's more than just a friend, we've been together now for about a year and just had a huge fight. I don't need any more friends, what I need right now is parents. If you can accept me in this lifestyle, I would appreciate a call back, if not, please understand that I'm at the point in my life that if you don't accept it or me, then you will have no part of my life." Um, because I had just gotten to that point where everything be damned, I was going to live my life. About two hours later, they called back. Huh, whew, [laughter]. For that full two hours I was just kind of really nervous. The first thing that they said was, "Do you need us to come down?" which was really nice. Um, at that point I was like, "No, I just need to know that you're there. This is something that I have to work through and I just need know that I have you as a support." When I came back home, um, it was little awkward at first because, of course, it took me 21 years to come out and deal with it. So, of course, they had to have some adjusting time. Um, but through it we learned a lot about our family relationship, about, um, how we interact with each other, what's actually important. Um, and I had done some speaking ... with...the Maine Speakout Project. Uh, and what was really neat, is my father also joined it. And so, my father and I were able to go out and do some speaking...together as a father and son team, which was really nice.

Um, overall, would I say this area here is a safe community? If you are

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Maine Rural Network is to promote visibility and security for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people living in rural Maine, and to work for social, educational and economic justice for all Maine people. The Maine Rural Network seeks to accomplish this by empowering individuals living in rural Maine to organize, establish and support autonomous groups locally and to create a network statewide.

Publication Information

Network News is published quarterly in March, June, September and December. If you would like to contribute a calendar item or short article please send it to us by the 15th of the month prior to the quarterly publication date.

Maine Rural Network
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Rural Lives Project — Report from Aroostook County...

This past June, Madeleine and I traveled to Aroostook County, to record the personal histories of individuals for the Rural Lives Project, including long time gay activists, a rabbi and an Acadian gay man. Excerpts from the first interview from that Aroostook trip are included as the lead story in this edition of *Network News*. We have also contacted the Houlton Band of Maliseets in order to request interviews, but we learned that we need to obtain approval from the Tribal Council in order to have access to and to interview members of the tribe. We hope that a return trip in the fall will include some of those interviews.

We are very excited about the progress of the Rural Lives Project so far. This project is important because it is, as far as we know, the only work being done in Maine to connect minority communities by showing their commonalities (and differences) concerning what it means to live in Maine as part of a minority population. It is important to document discrimination against minorities in Maine, since a sizable portion of voting age Mainers do not believe there is discrimination here. The education these stories can provide may make a difference in any future civil rights votes.

Your help on this project is welcomed — if you are a member of a minority group who lives or has lived in rural Maine, you may submit your story in written form or agree to be interviewed (you may remain anonymous if you wish). You can also recommend friends who should be included and anyone, whether minority or not, can help gather the oral histories. If you would like to help, please contact Naomi 642-2015 or nomad@psouth.net.

Naomi



Have You Moved?

If you receive your newsletter by mail, please notify us of any address change or seasonal mail stoppage. We are charged for every newsletter that is returned. Thanks!

Community Bulletin Board

Position Available

NARAL-NH Political Organizer

NARAL-NH, a non-profit, grassroots organization with 2,800 members statewide, is the political arm of the pro-choice movement in New Hampshire. Our mission is to develop and sustain a constituency that uses the political process to guarantee every woman the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices. The Political Organizer coordinates and oversees NARAL-NH's statewide grassroots political organizing activities. For a job

description, contact NARAL-NH or send Resume/cover to: Laura Thibault, Executive Director, New Hampshire NARAL, 18 Low Avenue, Concord, NH 03301; Phone: 603/228-1224; Fax: 603/226-4505; e-mail: laura@naralnh.org.

☺ ☺ ☺

Political Discussion Group Forming

Are you feeling isolated in your opinions? Would you like to share your ideas, frustrations, concerns with others? Then this group is for you. Join us on **Saturday, July 27, 7 pm** for the

first meeting of a monthly discussion group forming in Standish. ☎ 642-2015 for location and further details.

☺ ☺ ☺

South Portland House to Share

Victorian two blocks from Willard Beach. Includes bedroom and study, deck, garden, backyard for dog - no cats. Looking for quiet, clean, nonsmoking, professional, female. \$600 includes utilities. Avail. 7/1. 767-1668.

☺ ☺ ☺

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL NEWSLETTER...

With increases in postage and printing costs, MRN is asking the *Network News* readership, who have not done so already, to become members at the rate of \$15 per year (more if you can, less if you can't). If you are unable to pay this amount then pay what you can. No one will be taken off the mailing list for lack of payment.

Another way that you can help keep our costs down is to keep us informed of your current address whether it is a permanent move or a temporary one, newsletters are not forwarded and are returned to us, costing us additional postage.



I want to support the social justice work of Maine Rural Network.

Individual <input type="checkbox"/> \$20	Household <input type="checkbox"/> \$35	Activist <input type="checkbox"/> \$50	Organizer <input type="checkbox"/> \$100	Visionary <input type="checkbox"/> \$250	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____
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E-mail: _____					
Phone: day _____		evening: _____			
Town _____		State _____		Zip _____	

Your contribution for our educational efforts is tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to MRN..

Maine Rural Network 51 Shore Rd. Standish, ME 04084

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a strong individual...and don't let things bother you, then it's a fine place to live. Uh, I remember when I was...dealing with the fact that I might be gay during high school, I was petrified. Absolutely petrified. It's a rural community – there are farmers and – unfortunately, gotta use the phrase "rednecks" – that just don't understand and have absolutely no tolerance for anybody different from themselves. In high school, if you were in the theater department, you were automatically labeled as being a fag.... Um, but in, in growing up as an adolescent in this area, there was no resources for me that I was aware of at the time. So I was very isolated and very scared that somebody was going to find out. I did have a couple of instances in high school where people, you know, would throw me up against the locker, you know, say things. But at that point, I was so afraid to even admit to myself that I was gay, that I wasn't going, going to press the issue with anybody.

In a lot of ways...[I felt safer in Boston]. Because it's, there's a section of Boston that's predominantly gay and...everybody kind of looked out for each other, but yeah, I actually felt more safe, safer in Boston than I do here. And I've tried to analyze that within myself to find out, "Terry, is it something within you. Do you think because you're in a bigger city, more population, nobody notices you? Up here a smaller community – everyone knows who you are type of deal." And I have to be honest, I don't have an answer, whether it's an outside or an inside influence that makes me feel that way.

I choose to live here – the quality of life, to me here, is better than it was in Boston. Um, I just got sick of the rat race in Boston. This is a much nicer place to live, this is where I want to live. And I should feel just as safe here as I did in Boston.

...I love this area and I want to stay in this area and if there are things that I can do to make it easier for – not only myself, ...but others as well, then I, I try to do it.

I just wish that there were, more... educational services to try and change it around. ...one of the things that I would like to see is, and I know this probably won't change, but for the churches in this area to be more accepting of gay and lesbian people in leadership roles. ...one of the people in the church [I grew up in], contacted me...the other day. ...he said, "Why don't you come back to church? Terry, you can sit with me in the back and, you know, I just want to see you back in church." And I was just point blank honest with him and I'm like, "Because the church won't accept me." I'm like, "I was a minister of music and I played piano and led the choir and led the worship services for a few years at the church in Boston and people loved it. It was only after...they found out I was gay that they had an issue." And he's like, "Well, you'd never be able to hold a leadership position, but at least you could attend." And to me, you know, that just [pause] negates it 100%.



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